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BEYOND THE GIFT

Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology* (London, Bloomsbury, 2016. £21.99 pbk. pp. 169. ISBN: 978-0-56766-023-7).

In English language scholarship, Jean-Luc Marion has become best known for articulating the difficulty of true giving, showing the near impossibility of stepping outside of systems of exchange, reciprocity and expectation. Going well beyond this, Christina Gschwandtner lucidly draws upon his whole corpus to present a fuller, more theological picture. Speech and reasoning about God tend towards the liturgical praise of God in the mode of direct address, whether for infinity, perfection or power. God is approached as an icon, drawing us to a visual and conceptual vanishing point before the image, rather than perfectly conforming to our perception like an idol. God is revealed in saturated phenomena, which typically are not exceptional mystical artefacts but everyday items that, as we regard them, resist Kantian categorization by quantity, quality, relation or modality. God is received in perceptual actions that demand attention, discipline, training, devotion and energy. God is worshipped eucharistically, with past and future brought into the present and a new phenomenality inaugurated. Finally, as Marion explored in his 2014 Gifford Lectures at the University of Glasgow, while God is manifested in revelation, understanding is inevitably through the human rational categories that this unfolds. Nevertheless, in most biblical texts God is intuited and witnessed to as a phenomenon rather than reduced to a concept or sign. God is contemplated through wisdom and charity, in the iconological gaze of Christ in front of which the Spirit places us.

Marion's thought might appear abstruse and of limited practical application. However, it has long been sustained by silent prayer before the blessed sacrament and, as Gschwandtner persuasively argues, resists the simple distinctions usually drawn between systematic, practical and liturgical theology. Moreover, Marion deploys many biblical pericopes to illustrate and amplify points, which could inform preaching. The gift may be missed, as by the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. In the parable of the two sons, as the father in his forgiveness re-gives, the gift is recognized for the first time. On the resurrection morning, Mary Magdalene may not touch Christ, who remains at an iconic distance. Christ's disciples on the Emmaus Road intuit him as human but fail to recognize him because of lack of concepts, which only Christ is able to provide, as they walk. There can be little doubt that this is the work of a praying theologian.

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